

STRIPED CUCUMBER BEETLE CONTROL

## A PLAYLET IN THREE SCENES

By

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Characters

County agent	Johnny's father
Johnny, farmer boy	Neighbor Jones
Grandpa Wortle	Big Bug
Matilda Hicks	Sammie Scout
Several other beetles	

Scene 1.--Melon patch

(To typify melon patch, seed can be planted in shallow trays a few weeks before the meeting, and these trays can be placed in several places on the stage to give the appearance of a melon patch. The bugs' costumes can be made of cloth, cardboard painted with yellow and black stripes for the wing covers, and coil spring, such as door spring, for antennae. As the scene opens we find Johnny seated on a stone with his face in his hands as Neighbor Jones walks in. Sammie Scout hides behind objects on the stage most of the time, but occasionally sticks his head out and waves his antennae, then darts under cover again.)

NEIGHBOR JONES. What's the matter, Johnny?

JOHNNY: Last year I tried so hard to grow a few melons, but they all died before I got any to eat. This year the bugs were here before the plants got through the ground.

NEIGHBOR JONES (stoops down and examines the vines).

Why don't you try placing moth balls around the hills? I hear they will keep the bugs away.

JOHNNY: These bugs are not moths, but if you think moth balls will work I'll give them a trial.

NEIGHBOR JONES. Look who's coming now--that old busybody, Matilda Hicks. I wonder what news she has today. I'll bet she has some good remedy for these bugs.



JOHNNY (rises as Jones begins to speak, then sits down again).

I wouldn't doubt it, she has the answer for 'most everything.

MATILDA HICKS (a tall, thin woman with pointed face and very sharp features, enters, talking very fast).

Bless my soul! What are you two doing here? I should think you could find something more important to do than loafing.

NEIGHBOR JONES. Well, Johnny was just telling me about these bugs and I started -- (Matilda interrupts).

MATILDA. Huh! Those bugs. Well, if you will just go down the road there and get some dust out of the covered bridges and sprinkle it over the melon hills, you won't have any more trouble. I'll tell you it's good for the bugs.

JOHNNY (rises and stoops over vines. Looks up to speak).

I don't want anything that is good for the bugs, I want something that will get rid of them. But next time I come through the bridge I'll get some dust and give it a trial.

NEIGHBOR JONES. The covered bridges are about all gone, and how will we control the bugs then? (Takes out his knife and starts to whittle.)

MATILDA. Well, the dust from other bridges will do, but it isn't as good as that from covered bridges. In fact I hear that just plain road dust will help some.

NEIGHBOR JONES. Well son, your troubles will soon be over. Here comes Grandpa Wortle.

(All speaking at once.)

JOHNNY. Hello, Grandpa!

MATILDA. How are you feeling today?

NEIGHBOR JONES. Howdy, neighbor.

GRANDPA. Oh, right pert, except from the way my rheumatiz feels I think we'll have a change in the weather, probably rain tonight or tomorrow. It's been nigh on to 2 weeks since we've had a good shower. (Leans, both hands on his stick.)

MATILDA. Johnny here's been frettin' about these little stripped bugs on his melons.

GRANDPA (pokes vines with his stick).

Ah, shucks! Them critters are easy to handle. When I was a boy we used to get a pail of real fresh manure and make a good paddle then smear a little manure around the vines. It won't hurt if you get some on the vines and in addition to keeping the bugs away the manure makes the melons grow better.



JOHNNY'S FATHER. Well, Johnny, I just came out to tell you supper is ready, but it seems as though you are having quite a conversation here. What's it all about?

JOHNNY (rather startled).

Hello Dad. Wya' these folks been telling me how to get rid of these beetles.

JOHNNY'S FATHER. Why don't you put salt on their tails, then you can catch 'em? That's the way they catch birds.

All except

Johnny.

A grand laugh.

Curtain

Scene 2.--Same place, next day

Sammie Scout is present as in first scene.

JOHNNY (talking to himself, holds several small packages in his hands).

Let's see, now that I have all these things, what will I do with them, put a little of each around the plants? No! That won't do, 'cause I won't know which was best. I think I'll make a little experiment. (Stoops and works.) I'll put moth balls around these two or three hills (moves along), road dust around these two, and (moves again, stopping) try Grandpa's wonder remedy on these two. Pa said he once heard of using soot, so I think I'll try using a little of that too. (Here he rises and looks toward the road.) I wonder who that fellow is and what he wants.

COUNTY AGENT (enters).

Hello there, son, How are you? I am County Agent Smith from over at Dublin. I just happened to be passing by, and when I saw all those packages I wondered what you were doing.

JOHNNY. Well, I've been trying to grow some melons, but seems as though it can't be done. The bugs don't wait until the plants come up before they start eating on them. Last year some vines kept growing until the melons were almost ripe, then they withered and dried. I guess it must have been the weather.

COUNTY AGENT. The weather may have done part of the damage, but I imagine the beetles did mot of it.

JOHNNY. There were not many bugs around when the vines wilted, just before harvest.



COUNTY AGENT. That's probably true. There is an interesting story in that connection. The beetles damage your melons and cucumbers the same way. You probably know they eat the plants.

JOHNNY. They sure do. They can almost clean up a patch overnight.

COUNTY AGENT (takes a small leaflet from his pocket and hands it to Johnny.) Here is a bulletin that tells all about the beetles. These beetles also lay eggs on or near the vines, and the little larvae or worms that hatch bore into the stems, and sometimes kill the plants.

JOHNNY (interrupts and reads).

It says here that the third and possibly most important is that these little striped beetles carry a bacterial disease which they transmit to the plants and cause the plants to wilt and die just before the harvest. So far as en-to-molo-gists--I guess that means bugologists--know, the disease can only live over winter in the stomach of these beetles. After one plant is diseased there are several insects that can carry the disease to healthy plants. To prevent the disease it is necessary to kill the beetles before they get you.

COUNTY AGENT (has been looking over Johnny's shoulder. Johnny turns to face him).

Well, son, you can see why the melons died just before harvest. They got the disease from the bugs last spring, but the disease didn't kill the vines until just before the melons got ripe.

JOHNNY. Is that the only thing that would make the plants wilt and die?

COUNTY AGENT. Oh, no! In some places there is a different kind of wilt disease that lives and spreads, independent of the beetles. Then often there are small green lice that suck the juice from the leaves and cause them to curl up. Quite often they are curled so much they might as well be dead.

JOHNNY. But what can we do to kill these striped bugs?

COUNTY AGENT. If you will look at the bulletin it tells you what to use. (Again looks on with Johnny).

JOHNNY. Oh, yes, it says here to use calcium arsenate and land plaster or gypsum. What is calcium arsenate?

COUNTY AGENT. Oh, that's a poison, a sort of white powder. By the way, I have some already mixed with gypsum out in my car. Come along, and I'll show it to you.

(Johnny follows the county agent off the stage. As soon as they are gone, several bugs came onto the stage from the opposite side from which Johnny and the agent left.)

BIG BUG. Well, Sammie, what good news do you have for us?



SAMMIE SCOUT. I could hardly keep from laughing at some of these home remedies.

BIG BUG. What were they?

SAMMIE SCOUT. One fellow suggested moth balls. (All bugs burst into laughter.)

ONE OF THE BUGS. What does he think we are, moths?

SAMMIE SCOUT. One woman suggested using dust from covered bridges. (All bugs laugh.)

ANOTHER BUG. When I'm hungry, I'm not afraid of getting my face dirty.

SAMMIE SCOUT. There were a lot more things mentioned, but when that county agent fellow came along he talked about something new.

ANOTHER BUG. Oh, his dope is like all the rest.

SAMMIE SCOUT. I'm not too sure about that. What this fellow said gives me the creeps.

ANOTHER BUG. They got to show me.

SEVERAL OTHER BUGS Me, too!

SAMMIE SCOUT. Anyway, I'm going to be cautious.

Curtain

Scene 3.--County Agent's office

(Johnny comes strolling in carrying a large melon - if off season one can be made up - his face beaming, followed by his father, mother, and Matilda. County agent is seated, writing, but looks up as they enter.)

COUNTY AGENT. Hello, there, where did you buy that one?

JOHNNY. I didn't buy it, you gave it to me.

COUNTY AGENT. I didn't give it to you, because I haven't seen you since last spring.



JOHNNY. Anyway, I brought this to you from your melon patch.  
(Hands melon to agent.)

COUNTY AGENT. Thanks a lot, but I don't have a melon patch.

JOHNNY'S MOTHER. Johnny has called his patch yours all season because you saved it from the bugs.

COUNTY AGENT. Well! And what happened to the melon vines on which you used moth balls, soot, dust, and Grandpa's remedy?

JOHNNY. They're out of sight.

COUNTY AGENT. You mean they are the nicest vines you have?

JOHNNY. No, they're dead and gone.

MATILDA (who has been poking around).

I came along to see if I could get one of those books.

COUNTY AGENT. Sure, you may. I'll get you one. (Goes to file and picks one out and hands it to Matilda.)

MATILDA. Grandpa Wortle asked if I could get one for him.

COUNTY AGENT. Sure, that's what they're printed for. (Walks toward files.) Come on over, all of you, maybe there are some other bulletins you will find useful. (All follow agent and start looking over the file.)

JOHNNY'S MOTHER (picks up a bulletin and looks through it).

Here is one on clothes moths and their control. I'd like to have it.

JOHNNY'S FATHER (picks up bulletin, fumbles for his spectacles, and reads).

This boll-weevil bulletin looks good to me. (An insect common to your particular community may be mentioned.)

MATILDA. My word! I didn't know there was any one place where a person could get so much information. Won't I have lots to tell the folks when I go to prayer meeting Wednesday night! I'll bet all the folks will be wanting more information when I get through telling them what I've learned.

(All gradually walk toward the door. Each one bids Mr. Smith good-bye.)

JOHNNY'S FATHER. Come out to see us whenever you can. We'll need your help a lot.

SAMMIE SCOUT (knocks and enters by another door. Looks sickly).

Please, Mr. County Agent, can't you have mercy on me? I am the last survivor of my tribe of beetles, and my stomach aches terribly.



COUNTY AGENT. Sit down over here. I'll take care of you in a minute.

COUNTY AGENT. All right, Mr. Brown. Thanks again for the melon, Johnny. What are you going to feed the bugs next year? (Follows them to the door.)

JOHNNY (repeats rather loudly after others have left the stage).

Calcium arsenate and land plaster; and hereafter when I want advice I know where I'll come. Good-bye.

(At this remark, Sammie Scout rolls off the chair dead.)

Final Curtain

THESE ARE THE RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION.

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